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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work

Ministerial round table: full and productive employment and decent work for all: how can Sustainable Development Goal 8 be realized for women by 2030?

Chair's summary

1. On 13 March 2017, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the topic "Full and productive employment and decent work for all: how can Sustainable Development Goal 8 be realized for women by 2030?", under the priority theme "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work". The participants in the round table exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with an emphasis on legal and policy frameworks implemented to realize Sustainable Development Goal 8. The dialogue focused on successful policies to address discrimination and structural barriers and solutions to create decent work for women and accelerate women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment.

2. The President of the National Council of Women of Egypt, Maya Morsy, chaired the round table. She opened the meeting with an introduction. The Assistant Secretary-General/Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Lakshmi Puri, made closing comments. Ministers and high-level officials from 20 Member States and a representative of the European Commission participated in the round table.

Discrimination, gaps and structural barriers to decent work and full and productive employment

3. *Participants highlighted areas of gender-based* discrimination in the world of work, including the overrepresentation of women in informal and vulnerable

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employment. Participants addressed gaps in terms of equal access to education, the gender wage gap, access to social protection, women's disproportionate share of unpaid care work and women's limited access to the digital and technology sectors.

4. Discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes were recognized as major impediments to the achievement of gender equality in the labour market and full access to decent work, which required further attention, including by the education system and the private sector.

Legal and institutional reforms

5. Many participants stressed the importance of ratifying and implementing international legal frameworks for the protection of women's human rights to advance gender equality and combat gender-based inequalities and discrimination, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and regional instruments such as the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Participants highlighted the adoption of constitutional provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex and the adoption of legislation on equal opportunities and the elimination of sexual harassment in the workplace.

6. Participants emphasized that the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 8 required addressing the structural barriers for women's full access to productive employment and decent work. Some participants emphasized that efforts to implement and monitor the Sustainable Development Goals needed to prioritize and build on the Beijing Platform for Action.

7. Forging partnerships among line ministries, women's mechanisms and the collective voice of women articulated through civil society, unions and cooperatives was considered key to ensuring that policymaking aligned with the principle of leaving no one behind.

8. Participants described how polices and strategies on gender equality were used to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment in the world of work. Examples of good practices included the adoption of national priority programmes for women's economic empowerment, gender action plans and gender equality mechanisms to promote women's economic empowerment.

9. A number of participants underlined the importance of addressing multiple and intersecting forms of gender-based discrimination affecting groups, including indigenous women, women migrants, women with disabilities, older women, women and girls from lower-income families, women living in rural areas and women who are victims of violence. Participants provided examples of affirmative action measures specifically targeting discriminated and marginalized groups, such as programmes increasing allocations to benefit those groups, the introduction of minimum quotas and measures to promote access to training and education.

10. Multisectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination, including with the support of South-South and North-South cooperation, was crucial for a more coherent and collaborative approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Policies, regulations and incentives encouraging the creation of decent work for women

11. Progress was reported on policy reforms aimed at ensuring decent work for all, including: (a) social protections, such as minimum wages, equal wage regulations, paid leave and labour inspections; (b) gender-responsive fiscal reforms; (c) provisions to ensure better work-life balance through measures such as parental

leave (including maternity and paternity leave), making available affordable and accessible childcare and the creation of breastfeeding stations; and (d) flexible working arrangements, including part-time and telecommuting arrangements. Some participants highlighted the importance of eliminating violence against women and ensuring women's full access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, as crucial enablers of women's economic empowerment.

12. Participants acknowledged the overrepresentation of women in certain occupational groups, such as the public health and education sectors, as well as in the informal sector, and the lower representation of women in technical areas of work. To address occupational segregation, measures have been taken to increase salaries in health, education and care services where women are concentrated, to promote access to occupations in which women are underrepresented and to prohibit job descriptions that discriminate on the basis of sex.

13. Moreover, some participants stated that inequalities were being addressed through reducing the illiteracy rate, affecting women in particular; improving access to quality education, including technical and vocational training; reducing poverty and child mortality; and fighting against early marriage.

14. With regard to the private sector, several participants referred to the implementation of regulations and awareness-raising initiatives aimed at promoting cultural change in private companies. Targeted incentives, such as awarding seals of excellence, required that companies: (a) guarantee women's right to join trade unions; (c) prevent and eliminate discrimination and harassment in the workplace; (b) increase women's access to public procurement; (c) adopt special measures to support victims of violence; and (d) promote gender-responsive, flexible working arrangements.

Measures to encourage women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment in the context of decent work

15. Many participants stressed the importance of supporting women's entrepreneurship, targeting in particular young women and rural women and women living with disabilities, to enable women's access to finance and markets, skills development and social protections. Measures taken to support women's entrepreneurship and sustainable cooperatives include: (a) capacity-building and training programmes; (b) providing tools for access to the labour market, with a focus on the gender gap in the technology and information technology sectors; (c) the provision of seed funding, loans, leases and microfinance schemes for entrepreneurs to develop small and medium-sized enterprises and start-ups; (d) providing technical support on the development of a business plan and on efficient and sustainable land use and management.

16. Some participants reported that women's leadership had been promoted on the political level, through the appointment of women to high-level positions and through the promotion of women's participation in the three branches of government. In the same vein, measures have been taken to promote women's representation on corporate boards.